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THE
CANKER WORM;
OR THE
G O U R D
O F
CREATURE COMFORT
W I T H E R E D.

Set not your Affections on Things below.

PAUL.

BY JOHN MACGOWAN.

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THE GOURD OF
CREATURE COMFORT
W I T H E R E D.

But God prepared a Worm when the Morning rose the next Day, and it smote the Gourd that it withered. JONAH IV. 7.

THE book of Jonah is one of the most astonishing pieces of ancient history; as instructive as it is marvellous. Some of the very interesting incidents recorded in it, I shall a little point out to my reader; and may that holy spirit, by which it was indited, make it life to the souls of both writer and reader. The

1st Instance which I shall note, is that very awful proof of human depravity, in God's own people, recorded in the case of Jonah. God commanded Jonah *to arise and go to NINEVEH*, that great city, and cry against it; because the iniquity of its inhabitants was come up to heaven before God *. But Jonah, far from obeying the word of the Lord, resolved to secure his own honour, and let God send by whom he would send; though, at the same time, it was at the expence of his conscience, and at

* Jonah i. 2.

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the hazard of the divine displeasure. He knew, that the Lord is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil denounced *. And he might also, by the spirit of prophecy, foresee, that the Ninevites would repent at his preaching; that of course they should not be destroyed, according to his prophecy; consequently that he should by many be accounted a false prophet. People might have said, "Jonah prophesied the destruction of Nineveh; but see, Nineveh is as flourishing as ever." But this disgrace was insufferable to the unmortified spirit of the prophet; therefore, instead of *Nineveh*, he flees to Tarshish, in order to escape the presence of his God.

Even after God had cast him into the depth of the sea, and kept him in close durance in the fish's belly, forced him, as it were, to obey, he could not submit to the merciful conduct of his maker; but valued his own reputation more than that city, in which were more than six-score thousand infants and ideots, who knew not the right hand from the left. Even justifies his rebellion, and tells God to his face, that he does well to be angry with his conduct. Yet, with all this strong cor-

* Jonah iv. 2.

ruption and shameless self-veneration, Jonah knew how to call, even from the belly of hell, in such a manner, as to be heard and regarded in the highest heavens; and whilst imprisoned in the deep, to declare that salvation is only of the Lord*.

2. If Jonah's corruption is so very conspicuous, the mercy of God is yet more so; both as it respects Jonah and the Ninevites. It was, indeed, amazing, that the Almighty did not plunge the rebellious prophet into the ocean of his unalterable displeasure, instead of chastising him in the manner recorded in the history. Instead of chastising him with the whip of paternal anger, and fatherly resentment, he did not cast him down amongst the *scorpions* of the bottomless pit. Instead of being interred for three days and nights in the belly of the fish, he was not forever buried in unalterable perdition. But the history of Jonah shews, that there is redemption with God, that he may be feared; and mercy for offenders, that their prayer may be encouraged.

Nor was that mercy shewn to the Ninevites, on their repentance at the preaching of *Jonah*, less illustrious. For even Jonah, whose good name was so very dear to him, was obliged at last to obey, and

* Jonah ii. 9.

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preach unto them the preaching he was bidden; and notwithstanding the strength of his corruptions, to cry against Nineveh ~~that~~, which he very well knew, or at least strongly suspected, would not be fulfilled. He had not gone over more than a third part of the city, before the doleful prophecy reached the court, carrying conviction wherever it was published. All ranks and degrees of men received the word of the Lord, turned from their evil ways, repented in dust, and solemnly fasted before God, with a view to deprecate the threatened judgment, and propitiate the deity. He beheld their humiliation, he accepted their persons and repentance, and spared Nineveh, that great city, in which were not so few as six score thousand souls, who knew not their right hand from their left; all of whom, with every inhabitant, were by Jonah's preaching doomed to just destruction.

3. We see what absolute obedience God requires of all his prophets, and people in general; admitting none of them into his council, or suffering them with impunity to controvert his commandments. Jonah thought, as God was so very mercifully disposed, that it were better not to send such a positive threatening; therefore he did not like that preaching which God had
bidden

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bidden him preach. For his own part, he did not choose to risk his reputation as a prophet, for the sake of Nineveh; had there been double the number of people in it; therefore, if God was resolved to send such a peremptory threatening, it should be by another prophet. But who, ever hardened himself against God and prospered? Not Jonah. For God is as peremptory in commanding, as Jonah is in his refusal; and now in this struggle it remains to shew, upon whose side victory declares herself. Jonah is determined not to go with any such preaching, and God is determined that Jonah shall be his messenger to deliver that very message, and no other.

Jonah embarks to flee by sea from the land of Israel; God rides upon a cherub, and on the wings of the wind does fly, in pursuit of the fugitive prophet. The winged gales are not able to convey the vessel so fast, but that it is overtaken by Jehovah in his cloudy chariot, riding velocrionously in the rapid storm, designed as the messenger of Jonah's arrest. He would needs to sea, to escape from the presence of his God; but he shall now be convinced, that God is the God of the sea, as well as of the dry land; for God will punish him by that in which he put his trust, and meet him in an undesirable manner, where
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he is least of all expected. The ship in which he sails is arrested; and all the skill of her crew is not sufficient to bring her to a port of safety. To lighten her burden, the cargoe is cast overboard; but nothing will appease the raging ocean, till Jonah himself is cast into its deeps. 'Tis done; with fear and solemnity the prophet is cast out at his own request. For Jonah, who but just before would rather let Nineveh perish, than risk his own reputation; now, touched with a sense of his sin, chooseth rather to die, than this little company should perish on his account*. Such a difference is there between the disposition of a person when he is, from when he is not under an humbling sense of his sinfulness.

God prepared a voracious monster of the deep, of what specie I pretend not to say; and to its care he commended his offending prophet, till he should redemand him, which he did at the end of the third day, when this monstrous guardian delivered him again safe into the custody of his God†. Jonah once more brought to see the light of the sun, receives the same peremptory command; “arise, go unto Nineveh that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.†” Having such a recent proof of God’s superior

* Jonah i. 12, 15. † Ch. ii, 10. † Ch. iii. 2.
power,

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power, whatever reluctance he inwardly experienced, he durst not provoke the divine displeasure by a second refusal; therefore he arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord*.

4. This prophecy teaches us, that God's dispensations may vary, and be different from his threatening, without any change taking place in his nature or purpose. Jonah knew very well, that it was the purpose of God to have mercy upon offending Nineveh; and that as he could not, consistent with his own honour, shew them mercy without their repentance, his preaching was designed to produce that effect upon them, and bring them to that repentance, which should be the preservation of their city. It is clear from this, that God who sheweth mercy, provided for the Ninevites the means of instruction, and by his own blessing upon the ministry of the word, brought them to that repentance which is acceptable to him, and justifies his perfections in the emanations of his mercy. How foolish and absurd are the lofty votaries for human agency, in adducing this history, to shew that the immutable God doth alter his purposes, as a change passeth on the conduct of his creatures, seeing a change for the better is entirely from himself.

* Jonah iii. 3.

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5. We see that God so wisely governs his kingdom, that even in his very punishment of the rebellions of his people, he investeth them with honour ; so little is his goodness dependant on human worthiness. Who could have thought, when the monster swallowed the prophet *Jonah*, that, in that very transaction, God was making him an eminent type of his Son's burial and resurrection. Such a striking type as the scriptures record none besides, and honourably quoted by Jesus himself, as his anti-type. Astonishing goodness ! That *Jonah*, peevish and fretful *Jonah*, quarrelsome and rebellious *Jonah*, should, in the very act and punishment of his rebellion, be made an illustrious type of the Saviour of the world. O grace, how independant art thou ! O mercy, how amazing is thy way ! Past, infinitely surpassing the utmost reach of human skill. Unsearchable beyond degree are all thy wondrous and mysterious ways. My soul adore thou the incomprehensible abyss, whence is all thy hope. Wonder and admire, that which eternity itself will leave unfathomed and inadequately expounded. Amazing transit was that of *Jonah* : from the belly of the sea-born monster, to the throne of the Lamb. Vast was the deliverance ; and most astonishing the change.

Jonah

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Jonah surely sounds a tuneful harp, and loud proclaims his dear Redeemer's praise; emulous in song, he will suffer none to outdoe him in loftiness of strain; none more joyfully to hymn the great Creator. These are some of the general lessons we are taught in this sacred prophecy; I shall now briefly note the contents of the chapter in which my text lies, in order the better to clear the way to my intended subject.

1. We find Jonah exceedingly displeased; very angry indeed at God's merciful conduct towards Nineveh. Strange it is to find such a disposition in a man, as to be angry, very angry, at the preservation of his fellow creatures. Stranger still, to find it in a saint and servant of God; but strangest of all to find it in a prophet, who most evidently was acquainted with the mind and will of God. This, if any thing will, may shew us, that the old nature, or carnal heart, is enmity against God; and that it is not taken away, neither absolutely subdued, even in real believers.

2. Jonah reasons with God against his merciful conduct towards Nineveh, that great city; and in the heat of his angry impatience, he wants to die. "I know that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and
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repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better to die than to live." q. d. Ah Lord! by shewing mercy to repenting Nineveh, thou hast ruined my reputation for ever. Thou hast robbed me of my good name, the loss of which I cannot survive. It is better to be hid in the grave, than to live and sustain the infamy which this affair has brought upon me. I cannot live to be counted a false prophet.

God rebukes Jonah's impatience in such gentle terms, "dost thou well to be angry;" that the prophet seems as if he had conceived some hope, that God for his sake might yet destroy the city; therefore he fled from it, and waited the issue in painful suspense. He went out of it to shun the danger, in case his prophecy should be fulfilled, that he himself should not perish in the general destruction; and to avoid the reproach of having prophesied falsely, in case the prediction should not be fulfilled.

He made him a booth, and rested under its shade; and to make it more comfortable, God covered it with a gourd, which he caused to spring up in a night; and Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd. Perhaps from this friendly interposition

terposition of divine Providence in preparing the gourd, gathering fresh hope, that God for his sake would still destroy Nineveh. But as Jonah's grief had been carnal and rebellious, so now his joy was merely sensual, the excess of which it behoved the Almighty to curb; in as much as carnal joy is to the full as fatal to the true interests of the Christian, as sinful fretfulness and murmuring. *Therefore God prepared a worm, when the morning was up the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.* It is not my intent either to trouble my serious, or to gratify my curious reader, by enquiring into the immediate, natural, and physical causes of these phenomena; all I aim at in this discourse being a moral improvement of the subject. The doctrine naturally arising from the words, is,

"That as mankind in general are apt, like Jonah, to delight to sit under the shadow of a gourd, God hath very wisely, and in great love, ordained a worm at the root of every gourd of creature-delight and comfort; by which means he drives his people to a more excellent dwelling-place, and more certain dependance."

In the opening and illustrating this practical truth, I shall

1. Point out some things, in which people are apt to promise themselves great
B pleasure

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pleasure and satisfaction; and which, in the event, evidently appear to be no better than Jonah's withered gourd.

2. Shew that there is a canker worm at the root of every gourd, and blasting in every creature delight.

3. Point out a suitable antidote against the poison of this smiting worm.

4. Draw some inferences from the doctrine.

I. Point out some things, in the enjoyment of which people are apt to promise themselves great pleasure and satisfaction; but which, in the end, appear to be in reality of no more use and value to them, than Jonah's gourd was to him; yielding only a gleam of momentary joy. To specify them all, would be both tedious to me and my reader; I shall therefore mention only such as are most obvious and common.

1. Riches must needs have the first place in our catalogue; as most people are of opinion, that could they but attain them, much satisfaction, pleasure and delight might be derived from the enjoyment of them; but the contrary has been frequently proved by the event. He that walks on foot, would be much happier could he afford to keep a horse; he that rides on horseback, would still be much more happy could he but afford to ride in his carriage; he

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he that does keep his carriage and pair, with one footman, sees great felicity in a coach and six, and a numerous retinue. He that begins the world upon nothing, would be quite delighted could he but call a few hundreds his own; he who has his hundreds, still sees great pleasure in being able to call so many thousands his own property; and he that hath his thousands, could he but multiply them by a tenfold proportion, supposes that he should reach the utmost pitch of human happiness. Yet after all, it has never been known, that riches give sleep to the eyes, nor peace to the weary heart; and at best, if trusted in, or in any way unduely regarded, prove but as Jonah's gourd, smitten at the root, and cloathed only with withered leaves.

Riches, like the eastern gourd, very often spring up in the night, without any toil or industry of our own, to shew the sovereignty of that divine Providence, whose it is to make rich, and to make poor. Hence you shall find some, now flowing in affluence, who but a very little while ago, were hid in obscurity, and surrounded with indigence. And like the same gourd we shall see riches frequently perishing in a night. How frequently do we see the fruits of many years industry, swept away in the shortest space imaginable, to shew that

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God only is the proper object of human trust and dependance? They are foolish, indeed, who trust more or less to uncertain riches, seeing they make to themselves wings and flee away, and in their flight, like the fugitive Spartans, leave only wounds behind them. My reader may assure himself, that the rustick swain can eat, can sleep, yea, can even die, with as much peace and composure of mind, in his humble cottage, as the most magnificent prince can do in a palace the most superb. And till it can be made apparent, that riches can make the head lie more easily on the dying pillow, it will be difficult to prove, that they are at all, more or less, worthy of the Christian's pursuit. If you deem a perishing gourd matter of exceeding joy, you may rejoice in growing riches with equal, but not with greater propriety.

2. Some others are as much enamoured with belly delights. Give them but costly viands, and well flavoured wines, they do not very much envy the miser his wealth. The children of Israel, when they got first into the barren desert, thought that they could very well be contented with bread; but when they had obtained bread, such as was never eaten by any other people, they placed their supreme felicity in the obtaining of flesh. Could they but have
flesh

flesh to eat, they could be as comfortable in the wilderness, as elsewhere. But without it, they could not be happy, as their whole minds run upon eating of flesh. God, in a day of rebuke, gave them flesh till they were gorged with it; flesh that destroyed the fattest of them. The voluptuary, whose God is his belly, and whose glorying is in the relishing sauces, has a worm perpetually gnawing at the root of his gourd. Nature, inadequate to its office, cannot fully compleat its concoction of the rich and relishing dishes, with which it was furcharged, before it is gorged afresh with more; insomuch that the voluptuary, although fed with *turtle*, has not half the pleasure of eating at his feast, as the labouring swain enjoys in his bread and cheese, his hung beef, or rusty bacon. Hence arise many of the disorders, which attend our flannelled gentlemen, and hysteric ladies. For a long train of diseases, followed up by death itself, constantly await the dwellings of luxury and debauch.

Those gentry may glory, as much as they please, in the richness of their entertainments; but I could wish them to consider, that their life is altogether brutal; and that brutes of a rank inferior to theirs, enjoy more exquisite pleasure in eating and drinking, than the voluptuary in ordinary

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can possibly do. Just above, I compared the voluptuary to the country rustic, and shewed what advantage the latter has over the former, but I retract the inequitable comparison, as doing dishonour to the honest and healthy swain, to be compared with those belly worshippers; those inviters of ghastly disease. We may find among the brutal ranks, those who may more fitly be compared to this BEAST OF REASON, who, if not lost entirely to common sense, may know that the horse and ass relish their oats, and the very hog his acorns, every whit as well as an alderman does his turtle, and enjoys them with as keen a gust.

3. Some, from whom it hath pleased God to withhold the fruit of the body, are vain enough to suppose, that happiness depends greatly in having children given them; even to suppose, that to be without them, is not so soon to be chosen as death itself; therefore their cry is with Rachel, "*Give me children or else I die.*" But this does not always answer the parent's expectation; for it may happen, that RACHEL, who cannot live without children, may have them given to her, but never live to enjoy them. It was so with the spouse of the Patriarch, and it has been so with many others, who, like her, could
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not live without children, and unto whom the very gratification of their desires was mortal.

Besides, many have lived to enjoy the children for whom they have been so very anxious, but have been very far from having that pleasure in them, with which they might once have flattered themselves. David had but very little pleasure in his beautiful son Absalom; Solomon in Rehoboam; Isaac in Esau, or Abraham in Ishmael. The contrary to the parents hopes and expectations, very often takes place with respect to children; which ought to make those, to whom they are denied, well satisfied in their circumstances of reputed sterility. Many a parent, who has lived to be the grieved witnesses of the vicious conduct of his children, not to mention their untimely end, so very shocking to parental feelings, would be truly glad, if it had been the pleasure of God to have wrote them down childless. Yet all these sad and melancholy instances, are not sufficient to restrain parents from forming high expectations from the enjoyment of children. For my own part, I freely confess, that my temptations lie in the contrary extreme, and are as groundless as those I am censuring, barring the general depravity of all human hearts, and the many

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many temptations to which youth are exposed, in such a vicious age as this of our own.

4. HUMAN ESTEEM is another gourd, under which the sons of men are apt to shelter themselves. But he must be very little acquainted with depraved humanity, who can be exceedingly joyful because of this gourd, any more than the former. Had I really the esteem of my contemporaries; that would be no proof at all of my personal merit, for I cannot as yet believe, that the voice of the people is the voice of God; seeing Herod, who had the voice of the people for his divinity, was not deified notwithstanding, but smote with a vermicular disease. Who had ever more esteem than *Alexander the Great*? And who was ever a greater villain, a greater enemy to Adam's posterity, than that Macedonian madman; mad with ambition and avarice? If the world judged of characters according to their intrinsic merit, it would be worth while to court its approbation; but if the public taste is so viciated, that a pea is preferred to a pearl, and a pebble to a diamond; if knaves are supported by public applause, and virtue is groaning in chains; if self-seeking villains can out-wit public wisdom, and modest piety and worth cannot gain attention;

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are the suffrages of the public at all to be accounted of by the Christian?

He who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; he who went about continually doing good, and spent his whole life in seeking the welfare of lost sinners, could never obtain the public esteem. If the voice of the public, even the patriotic public, concerning the Redeemer of mankind, be, "*away with him, crucify him, crucify him;*" who that loves his immaculate person; who that has cordially taken up his cross with him, would be sanguine about it? Who that has felt the power of his resurrection, and enjoys the fellowship of his sufferings, would depart from the path of known duty, in order to obtain public regard?

What, my friend, if thy name, and the history of thy heroic actions, are not recorded on monumental marble, nor engraven on historic brass, if they stand legible in the annals of heaven, and are recorded in the book of the lamb; hadst thou now the esteem of the populace, how uncertain its continuance? Nothing more uncertain than the public voice. Those very tongues which now cried out against the Redeemer, "*away with him, crucify him, crucify him,*" were singing to him, but a very little while ago, *Hosannah in the highest.*"

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highest." The very men, the *Lystrians*, who were for sacrificing to Paul as a god, not long after stoned him for dead, though their purpose was defeated by his kind preserver. We might descend to times more modern, and point out an English commoner, who was not only the wonder of Europe, but could do with his own nation what he pleased, within but a short period, sunk so low, as entirely to lose public confidence and esteem. How little then, is the voice of the multitude to be regarded? That weather-cock multitude, who bestow their praises for they know not what; and for as little reason retract them? Let every believer seek the praise which comes from God, and live above the caprice of human humour. For of human praise it may truly be said, it is often gained without intrinsic merit; therefore seldom long retained: always precarious; got on a sudden, and lost on a sudden.

5. Connections in social life are as another gourd, under which people are very apt to promise themselves great joy and pleasure: but nothing can be more precarious and uncertain. Nothing more fleeting and transitory; yea, nothing more likely to produce effects quite opposite. All the delight arising from these connections, is likely to be as *Jonah's* joy, but

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of short duration. Those whom we have depended upon as the greatest blessing, have often proved the greatest affliction and cross.

Christian people, in communion one with another, are apt to form themselves into a carnal cabal. So friendly and sociable is this little knot of people, that they can scarcely live a day without each other's company; and so free too, that they must mutually impart the whole of their family concerns unto each other. By these means, they reciprocally put themselves, in a great measure, into each other's power; so that when the difference does happen among them, as happen it will, sooner or later, they are capable of doing the most fatal mischief to each other's reputation; and of being more injurious enemies, than ever they were comfortable friends. This personal friendship is merely carnal, and has no foundation in the gospel of Jesus; and therefore it is like every thing else which is carnal, transitory, and of very short duration; in the end fatal to the peace of every party of the cabal. Persons thus linked together, must walk very circumspectly, not to give mutual jealousy; for the least degree of uncommon regard let fall upon one, is interpreted a slight put upon another; so that
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this kind of friendship has a certain affliction, inseparably connected with it, and is of that specie of evils, which are their own punishments. Christ would have all who bear his image equally regarded, so far as his image is equally visible upon them, and so far as this rule is departed from, all friendship is of a carnal or worldly nature, and injurious to the kingdom and interest of the Redeemer.

6. Trust in meer outward ordinances, is another gourd, under the shadow of which mankind are prone to act. Man is a reasonable being, and as such he knows, that some kind of worship is due to his *Creator*; but the spirituality of that worship never occurs to his mind, before his heart is affected by the agency of grace. They put on an external shew of godliness, take up a meer form of religion, and rejoice in their own goodness, as Jonah did in his gourd. The formalist is sober and temperate, virtuous and just, and religious too in his own way; for he desires to flee from the wrath to come, like that young Jewish gentleman who came to Jesus, enquiring the way to eternal life; and who, notwithstanding, refused it when explained to him, because it was very opposite to his present interests and inclinations. Under this gourd many sit with joy, as if it were
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the living vine, until God prepare a worm to smite its root, so that its leaves become shrivelled, and no longer render their booth comfortable.

This is one of the lying refuges, which the prophet has doomed to destruction; one of the sandy foundations which must be razed, in order to our enjoyment of the gospel hope. God hath ordained, that all who kindle a fire, and walk in the light of it, all who compass themselves about with sparks, which they have kindled, shall have nothing but anguish of heart*. Hence when disease and a death-bed approach, their religion is gone, it yields them no comfort; like the morning cloud, and the early dew, it is passed away, and the soul is destitute of an assylum of safety. What is all the religion of the formalist, but as the hungry man's dream†? *He dreams that he eats and drinks.* They dream of doing God good service, and of reaping great advantage from the fruit of their labours. But when the dreamer awakes, his soul is empty, he is faint and hath appetite. So it is with the formalist; when he comes to himself, he finds his soul empty of all that good, of which he once considered himself the subject. What an alarming awakening out of his dream had Paul, that

* Isai. l. 11.

† Chap. xxix. 8.

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most zealous and most accomplished formalist? How great his surprize, when he found himself, with all the ardour of his zeal, to be fighting against God? That, with all his strict religion, he had never so much as been accounted to pray; but held, as standing on a level with, if not in a more dreadful situation, than the most abandoned miscreant, or the blindest Pagan, who never heard of the promised MESSIAH. Wretched is the hypocrite's hope, which must perish sooner or later. No hope can triumph over the horrors of death and the grave, besides that which has Christ alone for its immoveable foundation; *this* rises to heaven, and is full of immortality; *that* eventually gives place to horror, and everlasting despair.

7. Even Christian people are apt to form too high expectations from their relation to a gospel church, not considering that it is composed of fallible, imperfect men and women. And hence arise many temptations, doubtings, and questionings in the mind, on discovering imperfections in the conduct of church members. Nay, it may even happen, that relation to a gospel church, may be so far from lessening, as to increase your trouble; and yet your abstaining from church fellowship, would by the scripture be deemed an affront

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front to the Redeemer, and an avoiding of his Cross. If every individual was to examine closely into his own imperfection, and place his fellows but on a level with himself, he would see little cause to wonder at all the imperfection which discovers itself in militant churches. And if every member were to expect no more from others, than he thinks may reasonably be expected from himself, he would rather lament the general incapacity to do well, than be offended at any thing which may happen to have been done amiss. But a neglect of these rules is frequently fatal to our own, as well as the peace of others; and therefore an evil, which ought to be guarded against. I shall now,

II. Shew, that at the root of every gourd, there is a canker worm, whose envenomed bite smiteth it that it withereth. It was so in the type. Jonah's delight in his gourd could not preserve it from withering; it is universally so in the anti-type; God hath prepared a worm at the root of every gourd, having determined that his people shall trust only in himself, as revealed in the scriptures, as manifested in the flesh of his son Jesus Christ. And, indeed, what object so fit to be trusted as our good and faithful Creator? Surely he

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that made us has the best right to our unreserved confidence.

1. Riches, that beautiful and attractive gourd, under the shadow of which most people would be glad to sit, proclaims aloud its own insufficiency, and says, "*happiness is not in me.*" But the voice is not believed, till its truth is experienced. Contrary to the voice of reason and revelation, people will persuade themselves that much happiness must needs be enjoyed under this gourd; in comparison of what can be enjoyed from under its shadow. What diligent application? What rising early and sitting up late? What posting to and from market, to buy and sell, and get gain, is there amongst mankind? What neglecting of the best things, in order to increase wealth, is to be met with even amongst professors. How comfortable would the man be, could he but get his gourd into a condition flourishing enough? But let him have his will, and procure, if it were possible, enough of worldly riches; let his booth be ever so elegant, and his gourd of the finest verdure, he shall not escape the gnawings of the canker worm.

A secret conviction of neglect of duty, struggling with his anxious care, as a worm, preys upon his vitals, and drinks
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up his spirits. He is convinced that it is his duty to deal with a liberal hand, in proportion to his increase, but his niggardly heart will not suffer him to obey the heavenly monitor. He is constantly on his watch against being over-reached in trade by day, or robbed by villains in the night. His mind is perpetually on the rack, plodding how to get more, and how effectually to secure to himself what he has gotten. Yet can he not escape certain losses and disappointments that reach his very heart. And besides all this, the melancholy reflection that he shall not live for ever. How great the fall of the rich man, when he drops into the narrow grave? But greater far when he drops into hell.

He that increaseth riches increaseth sorrow, is a proposition but little believed, notwithstanding the doctrine of infallibility. Were it believed, is it possible that men would so eagerly court their own misery? And after they have got both riches and sorrow enough, continue intensely thirsting for more. What wringings of heart does the rich man pass through, when one after another breaks in his debt, and strips him of his property. These are anxieties from which the bosom of the poor man is exempted. Sorrows reserved solely to men of property, and from which very few,

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few, if any, of that character are exempted. Wise and becoming was Augur's singular petition, equally deprecating both riches and poverty, because equally dangerous to mental peace, and personal integrity. But how few ingenuously tread the footsteps of that pious man, and discover the same holy contempt of earthly riches? That they profit not in the day of wrath, we readily assent to in our judgment; but our affections and practice are apt to maintain a constant war with our understanding in this respect; so that the Christian man is frequently a contradiction to himself.

2. If a person is indeed so mean, so contemptible and brutal, as to place his delight in eating and drinking, he shall be sure to find a worm at the root of his gourd; such a *worm* as shall be like wormwood mixed with his dearest delights, and as bad as the gall of asps, envenoming his choicest pleasures. His taste will become so viciated, that he can seldom have satisfaction in what he does enjoy, and will be constantly pining after something which he cannot compass; or what he has, shall lack of the relish which he wished it to be attended with. The fault, which lies in the deprivation of his own taste, will be laid on the cook; and the epicurean shall rarely, if at all, have the pleasure of eating
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ing so as to gratify an healthy hunger. As a certain writer says, such people press nature with over-weighty burdens at once; and before she has had time to finish her business of concoction, they load the stomach afresh; so that squeamishness is sure to ensue. Then they flee to the dram bottle, to keep down the rising fumes, and help nature to do her work; being in herself inadequate to the task imposed on her*. Besides the vast train of diseases which arise from intemperance, which must make the life of the voluptuary a burden to himself, and the inactivity for business, which is necessarily consequent upon it, must expose him, if not past feeling, to the perpetual gripings of an uneasy conscience.

3. Should the fruit of the body be granted, to satisfy an inordinate desire for procreation, it may not happen that children are given for the parents comfort, or the fruit of the body for his lasting pleasure. Rachel cannot live unless she has children; but when God gives her her desire, she cannot live to enjoy them. Rachel dies as soon as Benjamin is born; and he, instead of being the son of her pleasure, proves the son of her sorrow. BEN-ONI. Abraham, who had so long waited for children, had but little comfort in his Ishmael, the

* Sir Walter Raleigh.

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son of the bond-woman. Isaac and Rebekah were weary of their lives, because of Esau's connection with the daughters of Heth. David had a numerous family of children, but in few of them he had the comfort of a parent. Disorders reigned amongst them. Uncleanneſs, ambition, and murder, greatly obtained, and made awful inroads amongst the children of the king. What care for their welfare? What fear for their miscarriage? And what real affliction for their actual miſconduct, do frequently tear the boſom of the thinking parent? Enough at leaſt to ſhew, that true ſatisfaction is not to be had under this gourd; and that he who has high expectations from his children, is in great danger of being miſerably diſappointed. Not to mention the moſt grievous diſtreſs which ſome parents fall under, through the ſtubbornneſs, rebellion, and looſe profligate conduct of their children, which brings down their grey hairs with ſorrow to the grave. In this ſenſe many children, inſtead of being a comfort to them, are actually the murderers of their parents. On the whole, I think, common obſervation will warrant me to conclude, that our connections in life yield as much pain and diſquiet on one hand, as they do pleaſure and delight on the other.

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4. The esteem of mankind, whether prophane or religious, yields but a very uncomfortable shadow to those who delight in it. It is obtained, perhaps, with great difficulty; and not less difficult to retain. Fleeting and precarious in its nature, often withheld from the man of merit, and conferred on the worthless. Who would value that ill judging voice, which prefers Barrabas the murderer, to the Saviour of sinners; which caresseth murdering and destructive Saul, whilst it persecutes and punishes the preaching apostle? Had the prophet Jonah been less tenacious of public esteem, he had been more obedient to his God; his name and memory had been transmitted down to posterity in the sacred annals, with far greater advantage and lustre. Were Christian people to be more strict in their enquiries after the will of their God, as revealed in the word, and less cautious about the approbation or disapprobation of the public, their lives would, in general, be proportionably more useful; and their souls would possess a richer experience of that divine peace of God, which passeth all understanding. But an undue regard to the public voice, in matters of religion, is sure to be the parent of error, of leanness and barrenness of soul. As in an equal proportion to the credit

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credit or discredit we give to human testimony, we honour or dishonour the Redeemer, it cannot be at all thought strange if he send barrenness of soul where he is most dishonoured. Nothing seems more natural; nothing can be more reasonably expected.

5. When people join themselves to a church of Christ, they are apt to form very high, and very unjust expectations; as if the militant church were composed of perfect and sinless beings, rather than imperfect beings, who in many things offend, and who, in all they do, come short of the glory of God. Hence it happens their disappointment is frequently great; and some people, on the discovery of imperfect conduct in churches, are ready to wish they never had given themselves up as members; not considering the true end of church fellowship. It is an institution designed only for imperfect men and women, and which could in reality be of no use to them had they attained, or were already perfect. He that is perfect can walk alone; he that can walk alone has no need of a companion; and therefore there is a necessity, from the very nature of its constitution, that the believing church should be imperfect in its members; consequently they

they err exceedingly, who expect perfection from the church below.

It appears not to me, that those who expect to escape trouble by being admitted into church communion, have a right view of the subject. Our leading view ought to be, to receive and impart more liberally, and this will lead to a taking up the cross even in church communion; and I am either greatly mistaken, or it is there where the cross is principally to be expected, in these days of external peace and legal protection. Nor ought we to think it at all strange, that many things should turn up disagreeable from the spirit of christianity. For were it not so, to what purpose should we be admonished to bear with and to forbear one another. If the conduct of a church, in all its members, were indeed uniformly consistent with the spirit and commands of the adoreable Jesus, there would be nothing to bear, no exercise for a forbearing disposition; no exercise for God-like forgiveness.

6. Nor is peace of our own procuring productive of a more salutary shadow to those who set under it. This, as Ephraim's goodness, is like the morning cloud and early dew which passeth away. Our obedience is praise worthy, when springing from gospel motives; but if in any sense
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the ground of our dependance, it becomes an antichrist, and all the peace derived from it is doomed to destruction.

Young converts in particular, are very apt to place too much dependance on their duties, frames, and dispositions; as these are good, their peace and comfort are strong; as bad, they wither and decline. The best endeavours to please; the most sacred institution, if trusted in, prove no better than a temporary gourd, soon grown and soon withered.

God will by no means have creatures dignified, with any dignity besides that with which he himself is pleased to invest them. He hath purposed to stain the pride of all flesh, and to lay creature glory low in the dust. He will teach his people, how stubborn soever, to obey; and however much attached to creature-delights, to live upon himself. He is determined to have all the glory of his people's dependance and support, and has therefore prepared a worm at the root of every gourd, in which they are apt to place their trust, and from whence they derive a temporary delight: so that by blasting their gourds, he may bring them to delight in himself, and take up their rest under the shadow of his Almighty wings. Hence all the afflictions, losses, tempta-

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tions and crosses of the Lord's people; for these come not by chance; they spring not of themselves out of the dry ground; they are kindly ordained, to promote the divine life in your souls, and to foster them up for heaven, the inheritance to which they are predestinated.

There being then a worm prepared at the root of every gourd, and as a late author* observes, a crook in every lot, it may now be expedient to point out to my reader, a certain antidote against the poison of this canker worm, which is the

III. Thing to be attended to. In general one would suppose, were we not acquainted with the plague of man's depraved heart, that the following things would be antidote sufficient, if properly attended to.

1. The vanity, emptiness and uncertainty of worldly riches. They seldom serve for any other purpose to the proprietor, besides puffing him up with a fond opinion of his own importance, and indulging him in gratifying his vain ambition, of lording it over those whom Providence has put off with a more scanty measure, of what the world calls good. The very owner finds them empty, even in the enjoyment. All that he has, still

* Boston on Divine Sovereignty.

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leaves room for more; and every new gratification leaves the soul empty. Nor are they more certain than satisfactory; for they make to themselves wings and flee away; flee away never to return; flee away so as to leave nothing behind them, but the sad remembrance that they were once enjoyed. How much better to be interested in heavenly riches, than to enjoy those that are only temporary.

2. All temporal honours vanish in the grave, where distinctions are no longer known. There the mitred prelate is reduced to a level with the country curate of 20 l. *per annum*. The imperial monarch lays down his head on a level with the starved beggar; and the finest lady is no higher than the village damsel, unless indeed she obtain this sorry pre-eminence; "to rot in state*." All are dust; all shall return to dust, through the way of nauseous putrification. No art nor care can possibly evade that dire, tremendous sentence. "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return."

3. God unites natural relations, not in an indissoluble, but in a dissolveable relation; all gourds of this kind grow up intentionally to wither. Therefore those that are married, ought to be as though they were not married. And those that have

* Blair on the Grave.

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have children, as although they had none. Children in particular are certain cares, and but very uncertain comforts; given to be taken away, and very often better taken away than spared. So that God has written *vanity* on every creature delight; and he that tries the whole circle of creature enjoyments most, shall find them to be but vexation of spirit. A truth, to which my judgment readily subscribes, but to which my affections can hardly be won to submit. Though bruised in a mortar with a pestal amongst wheat, like Solomon's fool, yet does not my foolishness depart from me.

But something more effectual than these considerations, pertinent as they may be, may yet be proposed. Not, indeed, under the notion of a gourd, but of a stable oak, which can withstand the most violent tempest. Not a shrub of a dwarfish stature, but a tall cedar, which overtops every hazy cloud, and lifts itself above the convulsions of the atmosphere. Not an empty shadow, like that of Jonah's gourd; but a substantial and ever-during shadow, under which you may with pleasure and safety take your everlasting repose. My God, may this shadow be my only refuge for ever and ever! May my soul desire no sanctuary but this! From this alone may I

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derive all my enjoyments! In this alone have perpetual delight.

1. The love of God, the free spontaneous and sovereign love, in which he himself externally rests with ineffable complacency, may well be understood as a suitable, a safe and permanent rest for his people. This is very far from being like *Jonab's* gourd, the leaves of which could break the intense rays of the sun, and the streaming east wind, but very partially from his temporary booth. This is as walls of salvation on every quarter, a shield encompassing round about, leaving no avenue open, no place unguarded. Hence he that dwelleth in this secret place shall abide continually under the shadow of the Almighty *, and there be safe forever and ever.

Jonab's gourd was vulnerable even to the stroke of a worm; but all the power of the old dragon, all the venom of complicated guiltiness could not make the least impression on the love of Jehovah. This, effectually secures its dependants from all that, with any propriety, may be called evil; this engages, in behalf of its refugees, every person, every perfection of deity.

Jonab's gourd was of short duration; it sprang up in one night, and withered in

* Psal. xcii. 1.

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another. A fit and striking emblem of the Arminian representation of the love of God to mankind, as suspended on certain conditions, to be by them performed; and which springs up in a night (when they obey) and withers in a night when they fail in their performances. But the love of God is from everlasting to everlasting, immutably the same, without beginning or end, incapable of decay. So he says himself*; "I have loved thee with an everlasting love;" *i. e.* with a love that had no beginning, according to the primary sense of the word; with a love that shall never end; for that which shall have, or may have end, can with no propriety be called everlasting.

2. The obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the sinners substitute, is the shadow of a great rock, and not of a feeble gourd. Broad and extensive to furnish room for every comer; hence himself declares, "That of all that come to him he will in no wise cast out." Upon no consideration whatever. If even as vile as polluted *Magdalene*, and as guilty as bloody *Manasseh*. Why should he, seeing that yet there is room under his salutary shadow; room for all, that shall seek life and salvation through his name? To

* Jer. xxxi. 3.

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turn away a poor perishing sinner, calling on him for salvation, would argue a want of room under his shadow to hide from danger; of power in his arm to save from destruction; of virtue in his blood to atone and cleanse; and of merit in his righteousness to justify; which never can be the case with him whose works are all perfection.

It was under this reviving shadow the longing spouse sat down with such great delight*. She sat down, there to take up her final abode. She found him to be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, a place of refuge, a covert from the storm and from rain†. With equal pleasure and delight does the believer sit under the covert of the Redeemer's blood and righteousness, when he can see his sins blotted out as a cloud, and as a thick cloud his iniquities. His person justified freely from all things, delivered from condemnation to all eternity, entitled to the felicity of heaven and glory. No heart but his own, can conceive the reviving delights experienced in these halcyon days of nearness to Jesus, whose delightful shadow spreads vigour through the whole soul, and gives life and health to the countenance.

* Cant. ii. 3. † Isai. iv. 6.

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Far from being like our own obedience and goodness of frame, which is like the passing cloud; the virtue of this is everlastingly effectual, from the beginning to the end. Under this life-giving shadow, the patriarchs and prophets rested with as much security as the modern believer does. What it was to believers in the apostolic days, it is to us now; and what it is to us, it will be to all comers, even to the end of time.

Cease then, O believer; cease from temporary gourds. Call back thy wandering affections from transitory objects, and sit down with the spouse under the shadow of thy only Lord and Saviour. Here is rest, peace and pleasure; here is everlasting and ever-growing delight: but in the world all is uncertainty, all is disappointment. No happiness, no lasting satisfaction is to be expected, but in a living entirely upon Jesus, as our delightful portion, as well as all-sufficient Saviour from sin, and its tremendous consequences. Whoever, therefore, desires refined delight and happiness without a sting, let him turn in hither, turn in under this adorable shadow, for yet there is room. Room even for you, how vile, how wicked soever you have been; how loathsome, how desperately wicked

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wicked soever you may find the present frame of your hearts to be.

To you, O men, I call; and my voice is to those whose hearts are carried away by the things that are seen; who conceive of no higher felicity than that arising from sensual gratification. Your trust alas! is placed in fruitless gourds; your pleasantest morsel is but the food of swine. Shall I prevail with you, as rational beings, a little to reflect on your situation? Get the whole world in all its imaginary excellencies, what will it profit you without an interest in the love of God. Hell was not the less hot and dreadful to departed *Dives*, on account of his having died a rich man, and because his carcase was rotting in state.

If the world has your hearts, you are of it, and being of it, what can you expect but to perish with it; for it, and all its lovers, are doomed to destruction, from which none can rescue. Dreadful beyond conception must be the death of the worldling, robbed of all, upon which his heart was set, of all which he deemed valuable and worth his attention. Death robs, without remorie or pity, the rich man of his wealth, the ambitious of his honours, and the voluptuary of his every pleasure

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pleasure; lodges them all where darkness and despair for ever triumph. On the other hand, what felicity must death be to the saint, the sinner, whose only dependance is Jesus? It takes off every yoke, and unbinds every fetter. It frees him from every thing that may properly be called evil; and puts him in possession of all that is good and desirable.

One thing, and only one seems indispensibly requisite to true happiness; and that one thing, whatever it be, must be of a durable nature, must be such as will bear the dependance of the needy, of the weary spirit. The apostles could be happy, without possessing silver and gold: the worthies celebrated by the author to the Hebrews could be happy, tho' cloathed in sheep's skins and in goat's skins, though their best apartments were the dens and caves of the unworthy earth, and though all mankind were their enemies. Happy because GOD was their TRUST, and CHRIST was their SALVATION. An interest in the blessed Immanuel, possession of the divine life, knowledge of the loving kindness of our God and Maker, are necessary to our living comfortably and dying with triumph; necessary to our well being in this, and in the future world. Without these, we had better been strangled in the birth,

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birth, or dropped into the grave from our mother's breasts; better that we had never been brought into existence; for who amongst us, alas! can dwell with devouring flames? Who can endure everlasting burnings; as all must do who die strangers to Christ and his salvation. But to be born of the spirit, to be converted by grace, implies a right and title to every immunity of the children, every blessing of a well ordered covenant; secures to the soul the possession of durable riches and righteousness; secures the administration of an entrance into the joys of paradise, and a mansion in heaven, where there are pleasures for evermore.

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